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## THE TEACHING OF LATIN IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

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### I. INTRODUCTORY

The Department of Latin at the University receives every year from thoughtful teachers in all parts of the State inquiries concerning the teaching of Latin in the high schools. The questions submitted cover a wide range, from the first year of Latin to the fourth, and deal with a variety of problems extending from the planning of the curriculum as a whole to the best way of presenting the first declension to a class of beginners. From these letters taken collectively it is possible to learn in a very concrete way exactly what matters the teacher finds most puzzling in presenting his difficult subject.

On the other hand, the University enrolls each year in its Freshman class a large part of the product of the high schools. It is the practice of the department to encourage the new students in every way possible to reveal and to discuss the difficulties which they have encountered in their previous experience with the subject. To one the main difficulty has been a matter of inflections; to another, a matter of syntax; to a third, a matter of vocabulary; to a fourth, a matter of word-order. The different details set forth by many individual students can be put together in the same fashion as the questions that are presented by the teachers, and there results a composite point of view in respect of what matters the pupil finds most puzzling in learning the difficult subject.

The opportunity thus afforded the department of looking at common problems from two distinct angles brings before us at once the privilege and the duty of acting as a clearing-house of experience. The problems that call for solution are not new, nor are they the same for all. But most of them spring from common causes which prevent them from going out of date and which make them the business of us all.

The faults thus uncovered lie very often with us who teach, sometimes with those whom we teach, sometimes with the system under which we teach. A comprehensive examination of the faults of teacher, of pupil, and of system would certainly reveal many obvious mistakes whose mere naming would yield desired improvement. The most immediate lessons, however, to be learned from the clearing house have to do rather with the teacher than with the pupil or with the system. It is not too much to say that under any system and with any set of pupils it is the teacher who must be reckoned with primarily in estimating success or failure. And the three elements of success,

named in the order of their importance, are personality, training, and method.

The clearing-house yields very little data on the personality of the teacher. There are, it is true, frequent hints of want of enthusiasm for the subject, of lack of interest and of sympathy, of carelessness, of impatience, of nerves. But even if data were abundantly available, personality is not a thing to be altered so readily by preaching, and we are all only too apt to feel that a discussion of it applies to the other man, not to ourselves. Of training more is to be learned: that it is unhappily wanting in some cases, that it is not thorough enough in others, that it has been so narrowed as to lose direct contact with life, and only too frequently that an over-emphasis has been thrown on method as opposed to subject-matter. But training, like personality, differs with the individual, and the only possible generalizations, such as the necessity for a thorough and far-reaching knowledge of the subject, would prove of little profit. The material offered by the clearing house on the third qualification of the teacher, that of method, or the best ways of presenting the subject, is rich and full. And method in the sense in which it is here used is neither personal nor individual. Generalizations can be made and they may be helpful. Taking for granted, therefore, the system and the set of pupils, and eliminating the questions of the personality and the training of the teacher, it seems worth while to review what the clearing-house has to offer on the way in which the teacher presents his subject to his pupils.

In view of these considerations the Department of Latin has undertaken to prepare a set of very practical papers on the teaching of Latin in the high schools. The subject has been divided into a number of topics which have been allotted to the several members of the teaching staff. The various papers will be outlined and edited from one source in order to secure unity for the whole and harmony among all its parts. They will be published in consecutive issues of the HIGH SCHOOL JOURNAL.

The following are the topics which have been selected for presentation:

- Planning the High School Course.
- Planning the Year's Work.
- The Teaching of Grammar and Composition.
- The Teaching of Translation.
- The Teaching of Vocabulary.
- The Use of Outside Material.

A Model Lesson in Beginner's Latin.

A Model Lesson in Caesar.

A Model Lesson in Cicero.

A Model Lesson in Vergil.

A Working Library.

Other topics than these suggest themselves, for the subject is a broad one, but it has seemed necessary for reasons of time and space to restrict the matter to very definite limits. The principle operative in making the selection has been the inclusion of those topics only which bear directly upon the practical matters which have been presented most frequently at the windows of the clearing-house. In the first draft of the plan two additional topics were listed: the choice of text-books and the value of the study of Latin. Both of these occupy high places in the order of frequency of inquiry and both are undeniably important. But in spite of their importance and the frequency with which they are presented, there were valid reasons for excluding them from the present undertaking.

The choice of the text-book is not so vital as the choice of the teacher. One feels that too much emphasis is laid upon the book used. A good teacher will accomplish infinitely more with a poor book than a poor teacher will with a perfect book. And the books in general use are not so uneven in value that there is any grave danger of making a false selection. More help will be derived from discussing the question, how to use the material contained in any of the standard books, whatever the selection, than the question, what books to use. The latter inquiry, in order to be of real value, would necessitate an analysis of a large number of texts in such detail that it would occupy more space than it is entitled to, and at the same time would exclude more profitable matters. It would quickly resolve itself into a weighing of the relative merits of books almost equally good, and of arriving at the not very satisfactory conclusion that one is best for some things and another for other things.

The question of the value of the study of Latin is also a very practical one, and one with which the teacher is constantly confronted. It is a matter, too, which calls for instruction and careful thought. All of us should know and be able to state why we believe in the study of Latin. Now especially, in view of the rapid growth of vocational subjects and the consequent crowding of the curriculum, it is the part of every good teacher of Latin worthy of the position he holds to justify the work he is giving his time and thought to accomplish. But the papers that will follow are founded upon the conviction of the permanent value of Latin and of its fitness to occupy the

high place in the curriculum it now holds. They form a discussion not of whether we shall teach it, but of how we shall teach it. In the bibliography, however, reference will be given to books where full discussion may be found, and all teachers are urged to make themselves familiar with their content.

As may be seen in the topics listed above, many old themes will be repeated. All of us recognize the function of repetition in the learning process, but it seems that in our own needs we have not yet made sufficient use of the principle. Certainly there are some simple lessons we have so far failed to learn. Many things, too, will appear absurdly obvious to the experienced teacher, but the experienced teacher must remember the inexperienced. The repeated and the obvious will therefore not be excluded. Rather, we shall find ourselves constantly harking back to the old fundamental principles of thoroughness, drill, precision, clear statement, interest.

The treatment will be as simple as it can be made. Discussions of theory, valuable though they unquestionably are, are yet not a part of our present purpose. If we start with certain general assumptions—that Latin has its place in the curriculum, that we are teachers of Latin who desire to make our work as effective as possible, that a well tested method of presenting the subject is at hand for use,—we shall then be free to concern ourselves with the practical matters that confront us in our own particular school and in our own particular classroom. The course has to be mapped out for the current session—how shall we do it? The work is not progressing as we intended it should—have we miscalculated? Have we overlooked something? Where lies the fault? How can it be remedied?

The Department of Latin at the University is enabled through its courses for teachers in the regular session and in the summer term to make some use of its clearing-house facilities, but necessarily contact is limited there to a very few of the many teachers throughout the State. It is hoped that these papers will be helpful to more than can be reached within the limits of the campus. And it is to be remembered that a clearing-house is but a meeting place for purposes of exchange, that it possesses no absolute authority, that it can be of service only if it receives while it pays out. If opinions or facts are presented which do not square with the experience of other teachers, the windows of both the receiving and the paying tellers are always open.

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